

The fall of singapore



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World War II is widely regarded as the largest global conflict ever, with more than 100 million between 50 and 85 million. The Second World War not only tested the military power of many countries, but more importantly the relationships and cooperation between these nations. For Australia, a relatively new country, this was only their third military engagement and a chance to prove their loyalty to Britain and the Empire.

However, for Australia, war brought the distinct possibility of breaking such formalities between countries, and in the Pacific no battle would test Australia's relationship with Britain more than Singapore.

The Allied defeat at Singapore in 1942 changed the relations between Australia and Britain to a substantial extent, in an era when Britain's imperialistic rule of Australia was still present. The repercussions of the result of this battle signified an historic change in Australia's relationship with Britain due to Australia's decision to ally itself with the United States (US). The resulting decline of British influence in Australia was an outcome, as well as Australia's loss of trust and loyalty in Britain. While Britain's Empire crumbled, so did the loyalty Australia had so willingly placed in Britain since the late 19th century. This loyalty began to disappear when Australia allied themselves with the US, and when Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin altered the country's foreign policies; however, the 'nail in the coffin' was Britain's lack of support in Australia's time of crisis.

With Britain's 'imperial fortress of the east' having fallen, Australia was left extremely vulnerable to direct attack, and four days after the Japanese took Singapore, Darwin was bombed with 240 civilian casualties, and as a result

the Pacific became Australia's largest priority (Skirt. Mom, 2014). Almost immediately, Australia looked towards Britain for assistance, however British Prime Minister Churchill saw the European front as more important and denied any further assistance. Australia's imperial Insurance policy had run out. As a result, Australia allied itself with the US and increased its independence via foreign policy reforms, "Churchill disagreement over the handling of the Pacific war front signaled the beginning of the end of the British Empire.

-Lacuna Grant (The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 February 2012). While the Allies won the war, Britain was far worse off than any other country; its Empire in tatters, economically bankrupt and politically divided, Singapore truly did represent a turning point in the relations between Australia and Britain. The troops who escaped from Singapore began to question Australia's place in the British Empire and visa versa, and such a feeling spread through the Australian public (The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 February 2012).

With the allied failure at Singapore and the ensuing disagreements between Australia and Britain, there was a significant loss of trust between the two countries, which resulted in the creased influence of the British Empire in Australia. Australia's Independence and the waning of the British Empire's global dominance further contributing factor in the deterioration of relations between the two countries. During the early sass's Britain seemed less interested in supporting Australia, and more interested in having Australia support Britain (Paterson, 2008).

The reformation of Australia's foreign policies further reflected the disillusion of the Australia public towards the actions of the British during the campaign in Singapore. Since 1901, Australia's foreign policy had centered on the Empire, with Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton declaring that there could be "...

No foreign policy of the Commonwealth, the foreign policy belonged to the Empire," (The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 February 2012).

With 15, 000 troops captured by the Japanese in Singapore and 240 civilians killed when the Japanese bombed Darwin, Curtin became increasingly committed to Australia's security and decided to cut the nation's dependency on Britain. Curtin took the first step towards complete independence from Britain by ratifying the Statute of Westminster (1931), legislation that stated that Britain and her dominions were of equal status and were in no way subordinate to each other in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs (Hubcap's, 2012).

The ramifications of the reformation of this act was that Australia took full control of their domestic and external affairs, and in the process defied the idea that Britain were the superior member of the relationship between the two countries. By late 1941, the British war situation in Europe was dire and in the Pacific, inauspicious; Churchill had no option but to overlook Australia's needs in the Pacific, and withdraw troops from Singapore to strengthen British forces in Europe.

Historian Lacuna Grant reasons that this, "... Was the death of Imperialism in Australia, and the birth of Nationalism. (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1 5

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February 2012) The decline of the British Empire and its influence in Australia, resulted in the loss of much of the trust previously placed by Australia in Britain, and caused Australia to ally itself with a country more powerful than the entire British Empire. Despite Australia's independence as a nation, in 1942, it was still largely bound with the British Empire and considered them to be their only major ally; as a result, the decision by John Curtin, to ally Australia with the US, was groundbreaking in several ways.

Curtin's New Year message for 1942, printed in the Melbourne Herald on December 27, 1941 read, " Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom," (Livingston, 2006) . The ongoing campaigns in the Pacific, and Australia's own conflicts in Malay and Singapore demonstrated the military superiority of the US, and Britain's inability to support Australia at the most crucial time, were two reasons pivotal to the resulting relationship formed by the two countries (World War 2 History, 2013).

Having observed this, Curtin faced a clear choice and opted, prudently, to place the Australian nation's safety ahead of imperial sensitivities (Livingston, 2006). When defeat in Singapore became inevitable, Curtin explained to Churchill that an evacuation of the British troops in Singapore would be noninsured inexcusable betrayal (Merino. Com, 2012).

Brandenburg (2008) strengthens the idea that Britain's poor choices during the Singapore campaign, directly resulted in Australia supporting the US

when he states that, "... Hat Churchill ever Australian government, and only succeeded in pushing Australia to the United States..

. " Not only was Singapore campaign a changing point in the relations between Australia and Britain, but importantly a starting point for the relations between Australia and the US. The fall of Singapore was not only a significant event in the Second World War, but also a large reason behind the significant changes in the relations between Australia and Britain.

Australia's decision to support the US, the declining influence of the British Empire in Australia and the loss of trust and loyalty between the two countries all contributed significantly to the change of relations between Australia and Britain. Ultimately, Britain's inability to assist Australia during the vital defence of the Pacific, and especially Singapore, was possibly the largest factor behind the damaging of a previously unbreakable relationship.